



# BUDDHIST ETHICS (SĪLA) IN THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM

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## ABSTRACT

The present study argues that Buddhist ethical precepts (sīla) are the Universal law of cause and effect and fundamental principle of all Buddhist practices. Furthermore, sīla is the first in the sequence of threefold trainings (ti-sikkhā), the other being samādhi (concentration), and paññā (wisdom). It is with the practice of sīla that one is expected to gain samādhi, and with the development of samādhi, paññā is gained, which is to see things in its reality. Sīla is categorized into three themes, namely: Five Ethical Precepts (pañca-sīla), Eight Ethical Precepts (aṭṭha-sīla) and Ten Ethical Precepts (dasa-sīla). Buddhist Ethical Precepts are not a mandatory like the other religious laws and teachings. It occurs naturally, and is not promulgated by any gods. Therefore, there is no reward or punishment from any gods either for breaking or observing it. According to Buddhist teaching, the ethical precepts are concerned with everyone regardless of race, nation, religion, colour, sex, caste and belief. To put it in another way, the teachings of the Buddha is like a lamp.

**KEYWORDS:** Buddhism, ethics, fundamentals, meditation, nature.

## INTRODUCTION:

In Buddhism, ethics deal with individuals' day-to-day activities. Ethics can be described as the actions (*kamma*) that we consciously do. It contains bodily action (*kāya-kamma*), verbal action (*vacī-kamma*) and mental action (*mano-kamma*). Through these three actions, we generate wholesome actions (*kusala-kamma*) and unwholesome actions (*akusala-kamma*). The wholesome actions (*kusala-kamma*) are called 'Cāritta-Sīla'. Cāritta-Sīla is those precepts that are encouraged to develop, for they are fundamental to develop meditation and concentration (*samādhi*). The unwholesome actions (*akusala-kamma*) are called 'Vāritta-Sīla'. The actions which hinder in the way of concentration, such as meaningless talks, fruitless actions, and thoughtless thoughts. They are to be refrained and avoided. Frequently, Buddhist scriptures mention ten wholesome course of actions (*dasa kusala kammāpāṭha*) which are encouraged to practice, whereas ten unwholesome courses actions (*dasa akusala kammāpāṭha*) are to be abandoned.

## General Views of Ethics (Sīla):

Each author gives an explanation about ethical precept (*sīla*) in different ways and perspectives. Some call it as 'the ethical principles' or 'the application of norms' or 'principles', or 'feelings' or 'emotions' or 'the study and evaluation of human conduct' or 'motivation for good or evil', or 'for clearing away and suppression of defilements temporarily or 'restraining words and deeds. Also, some call it as 'moral volition (*cetanā*)' or 'conduct' or 'ethical discipline' or 'the foundation of the spiritual path for generating freedom from lamentation and sorrow'. Some mention it as the 'grounded foundation of meditation (*samādhi*)' or 'the Buddhist version of the 'golden rule' or 'incomparable power' or 'the supreme weapon' or 'the supreme food for the journey' or 'the best vehicle'. Buddhist ethical precept (*sīla*) can control bodily action as well as verbal action not the mind.

To put it another way, Buddhist ethical precept (*sīla*) is for controlling bodily action and verbal action only not the mind. Then how does one control the mind which is the forerunner and chief of every deed and word? According to a Buddhist perspective, if one wants to control the mind and understand the nature of the mind, he should go for meditation. There are two kinds of meditations. They are called meditative concentration (*samatha/samādhi-bhāvana*) and the insight meditation (*vipassanā-bhāvana*). By developing and cultivating meditative concentration (*samatha/samādhi-bhāvana*), all evil thoughts and unskillful actions which is born out of greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and ignorance (*moha/avijjā*) or wrong view (*micchaditthi*) will put aside temporarily. Sometimes, it can put aside and lasts for hours, for days, for weeks, for months, for years and for a decade because the mind is under control, training, taming and awake. In this regard, Ashin Thittila writes: "Meditative concentration (*samatha/samādhi-bhāvana*) can clear away the defilements for a considerable time so that they will not rise again so soon."<sup>1</sup>

However, by cultivating and developing the insight meditation (*vipassanā-bhāvana*) all evil thoughts and mental defilements caused by greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and ignorance (*moha/avijjā*) will be got rid of lastingly and eternally and attaining the awakening from the dream of existence. With reference to this, it is stated: "By means of developing one's insight, wisdom, one is able to dispel all evil thoughts and defilements. It is like cutting a tree by the root so that it will never grow again."<sup>2</sup> In order to attain such purpose of life and conquering all cravings (*taṇhā/rāga*), one should begin with observing Buddhist ethical precept

(*sīla*) since moral principle rule is the grounded foundation of meditation as described above. Without observing Buddhist ethical precept (*sīla*) it is impossible for completing and achieving the paths, the fruits and the ultimate goal of Buddhism, Nibbāna. "The word 'Nibbāna' means the absence of craving and extinction of lust, hatred and ignorance. According to Tipiṭakas, it also means 'Highest Refuge' (Parāyana), 'Safety' (Tāna), 'Unique' (Kevala), 'Absolute Purity' (Visuddhi), 'Supramundane' (Lokuttara), 'Security' (khema), 'Emancipation' (Mutti), 'Peace' (Santi), and so on. the total cessation of all grief and suffering (Dukkha) everlastingly."<sup>3</sup>

## The Meaning of 'Ethics' in Buddhism:

"The original word 'ethics' is derived from the Greek word 'ethikos'. And the original word 'ethikos' is derived from the word 'ethos'. The word 'ethos' can be referred to in various meanings such as 'character, habit, and custom. According to the Latin custom, it is called "moral philosophy".<sup>4</sup>

The English word 'ethics' is not popular as 'sīla' or 'morality' in Buddhism. According to Damien Keown: "There is not even a word for 'ethics' in the early Indian texts-the closest approximation to it is *sīla*, often translated as 'morality' but closer in meaning to disciplined behavior or self-restraint."<sup>5</sup> Among Buddhists, they prefer to use the word 'morality' or 'precept' or 'sīla' or 'sikkhāpāda' rather than a word 'ethics' when they refer to morality or precept or training or *sīla* or *sikkhāpāda*. And morality or precept or training or *sīla* or *sikkhāpāda* is considered a natural precept in Buddhism. It means that it is not given by any creator. In Pāli it is called 'pakati-sīla'. 'Pakati' means "origin or natural state or the crude stem of a word".<sup>6</sup> Sīla means "character or nature or morality or precept".<sup>7</sup> Pakati-sīla, therefore, literally means 'natural morality'. Socrates gives a definition about ethics as "virtue" or "knowledge".<sup>8</sup> His notion and definition on ethics is relatively different from a Buddhist perspective particularly the word 'knowledge'. However, when we closely observe and analyse the word 'knowledge' in Pāli means 'paññā' and 'paññā' means 'knowledge' or 'wisdom' or 'understanding'. 'Understanding' whether right understanding (*sammā-ditthi*) or wrong understanding/view (*micchā-ditthi*) is part of mental action (*mano-kamma*) if we see the ten skillful and unskillful courses of action (*kammāpāṭha*). Generally speaking, the word 'knowledge' defined by Socrates also means 'action' (*kamma*) or 'ethics' especially mental action (*mano-kamma*).

However, in Hinduism 'ethics' is called 'Dharma'. Dharma in Hindu Scriptures is translated as "religious law" or, "right conduct" or, "duty" or, "social order." Its root, *dhri*, means "to hold up."<sup>9</sup> Hindu ethics or Dharma is a commandment moral principles. It is a must for every Hindu practitioner to comply with and observe without fail. By practicing Dharma or observing ethics, they will be rewarded by God. Likewise, by breaking Dharma or ethics, they will be punished by God as well. So every action and deed done by them either good or bad deed, they will be judged, rewarded and punished by God. And the meaning of a word 'Dharma' in Hinduism is too different from a word 'Dhamma' in Buddhism. The actual meaning of 'Dhamma' in Buddhism means 'nature' or 'the natural' or 'just like that'.<sup>10</sup> It also means 'quality' or 'phenomenon' or 'object' or 'thing' or 'doctrine' or 'law' or 'virtue' or 'justice' or 'religion' or 'the scriptures'.<sup>11</sup>

## The Significance of Buddhist Ethical Precept (Sīla):

Buddhist ethical precept (*sīla*) is one of the pillars of Buddhist teaching which a truth-finder should live by and follow. There are three kinds of pillars in Bud-

dharma. The first pillar of Buddhist practices is called 'ethics' or '*sīla*'. The second pillar of Buddhist practices is called meditation (*samādhi*). The last pillar of Buddhist practices is called wisdom (*paññā*). These three pillars are extended from the Holy Eight Factors of the Deathless Path (*ariya aṭṭhaṅgika magga*). And it is known as the Middle Path (*majjhimaṭṭhapāḍā*) or the ancient path or the philosophy of the Middle Path or the Path of the Buddha. Amongst these three teaching and practice, ethics (*sīla*) is the preliminary and relevant teaching and method which a truth-finder should put into practice before the other teachings and methods because the first pillar, *sīla*, is the fundamental foundation for the arising of the second pillar, meditation (*samādhi*), the second pillar, meditation (*samādhi*) is the grounded foundation for the arising of the third pillar (*paññā*). To put it another way, for the fulfilling of meditation (*samādhi*) moral principle (*sīla*) is required, and simultaneously, for the fulfilling of wisdom (*paññā*), meditation (*samādhi*) is also required. So these three fundamental Buddhist principles and stages have to support and count on one another for completing and achieving its goal. Put it simply, they have to walk together in order to reach its destination. They are not able to separate from one another on practice. They should hand in hand on practice. First of all, one should keep moral principle and then meditation followed by wisdom in that order. By doing so, craving (*tāṇhā*) and ignorance (*avijjā*) which produce the evil thoughts, grief of the world and cycle of birth and death will be eliminated lastingly, eternally, permanently.

Nonetheless, when the first pillar, *sīla*, which is regarded as the grounded foundation of Buddhist practices is not observed or broken, the rest of all Buddhist practices would become pointless and nonsense because all your practices will encounter with an obstacle and less progress by violating the precept. And a life without moral principle rule is not worthy of living according to Buddhist teaching. It is better to die than live if you are living without observing moral principal rule (*sīla*). But the one who observes and lives by moral principal rule (*sīla*) is worthy of living and regarding a very meaningful life even living a single day on this earth because he lives in accordance with moral principle rule with self-restraining and right living. In this regard, the Dhammapada said: "*Better it is to live one day virtuous and meditative than to live a hundred years immoral and uncontrolled.*"<sup>12</sup> So life without moral principle rules are similar to a car without a brakes or food without salt.

For this reason, moral principal rule (*sīla*) plays a vital role in our daily life even for the life hereafter. And it always generates different consequences to the one who observes and breaks it. Accordingly, one should be very careful with one's action, speech and thought in our day-to-day life because every volitional deed, word and mind always causes the effect or consequence. In fact, we are the consequence what we were and we are going to be the consequence what we are. One can shape one's future life in the way one aspires for. Buddhism always teaches and advises to stand on one's own feet or self-reliance rather than counting on anything else. Consequently one's life is in one's own hands, and one is one's own refuge and protection. To put it another way, everyone is the master of his own destiny and his own self. So he can choose the way as he would like to be. On the other hand, all conditioned things are transient and impermanent. It means that whatever you are, it is subject to change because nothing is lasting, eternal and permanent. That is the fact or the truth of Buddhism. And Buddhism gives hopes to everyone who would like to change and improve his life and status from lower class to higher class, from a bad man to a good man and from a murderer to a holy man. This is Buddhism which is freed from permanent punishment and suffering due to one-time wrongdoing or one time mistake like defining in the other religious teachings and texts. And Buddhism sees that no one is perfect. Therefore, everyone can make a mistake intentionally or unintentionally. On the other hand, we should give him/her the opportunity to correct his mistakes, misconducts and wrongdoings because all human beings have the potentials to correct, develop and raise his mind from lower place to the highest place and from wrong action to the right action. And any breathing beings in this universe can develop his mind like any human being. Equally, all beings have the potential to attain enlightenment even gods. Thus human beings are considered as the extraordinary and intelligent beings comparing to the other beings.

### Types of Buddhist Ethical Precepts (*Sīla*):

There are three kinds of Buddhist ethical precept (*sīla*), namely; (1) Five Precepts (*pañca-sīla*), (2) Eight Precepts (*aṭṭha-sīla*) and Ten Precepts (*dasa-sīla*). Also, we can say that there are three levels of Buddhist ethical precepts (*sīla*) for observing. First of all, it is called the Five Precepts (*pañca-sīla*). The Five Precepts are regarded as the fundamental foundations of all Buddhist precepts as well as Buddhist practices to put into practice. Conversely, if one wants to collect more meritorious deed, one can also observe higher precepts than these, for example, the eight precepts (*aṭṭha-sīla*) and the ten precepts (*dasa-sīla*). Each Buddhist moral principal rule (*sīla*) generates different advantages and degrees for the observer. The more you observe higher precepts, the more you gain more merits and more blessings in your life. To put it another way, the more you can observe higher precepts, the more you are close to the four stages on the Path to the Awakening/Enlightenment, namely; (1) stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*), (2) once-returner (*sakadāgāmi*), (3) non-returner (*anāgāmi*), (4) a worthy one (*arahant/sāvaka-bodhi*).

### The Five Buddhist Ethical Precepts (*Pañca-Sīla*):

As described above, the five Buddhist ethical precepts (*pañca-sīla*) are the fundamental Buddhist principles and Buddhist practices in Buddhism. So if you are

a truth-finder, you should at least observe these five fundamental principles and disciplines. You should not neglect them. According to the Cakkavattisutta of Dīghanikāya, at the outset, the Five Buddhist Ethical Precepts (*pañca-sīla*) were laid down by the emperor Daḍhanemi to his people with the instruction: "*pāṇo na hantabbo, adimmaṃ nādāttabbaṃ, kāmesumicchā na caritabbā, musā na bhāsitaḍḍā, majjaṃ na pātābbaṃ, yathābhuttaṇca bhuñjathā'ti.*"<sup>13</sup> It means: "(1) Do not take life. (2) Do not take what is not given. (3) Do not commit sexual misconduct. (4) Do not tell lies. (5) Do not use fermented liquor and drugs. Be moderate in eating."

As I mentioned earlier, Buddhist ethics (*sīla*) is like the universal rules. So everyone can observe it. Everyone who pronounces and recites: '(1) I do not take life. (2) I do not take what is not given. (3) I do not commit sexual misconduct. (4) I do not tell lies. (5) I do not use fermented liquor and drugs'; it means that you make a vow to yourself voluntarily. No one comes and forces you to pronounce or recite it. Accordingly you have to keep your promise to yourself. Of course, if you break your promise and determination as you are reciting or declaring or breaking each of the five precepts, you must be responsible for your own mischievous conduct and wrongdoing with your own self. No one will take that responsibility for you. And all volitional unwholesome actions and its results which are caused from your own deed, your own word and your own mind and thinking, they will always follow you like your own shadow following you. They will not leave you. And it is waiting for the right time to bear its fruits to you. Accordingly whatever you sow, you have to reap it sooner or later.

However, in case you are able to keep your vow, promise and determination as you are pronouncing and reciting, those meritorious deeds will help you, protect you and support you throughout your wandering life journey (*samsarā*) and spiritual path as a result of that. And they would become your true protector, supporter and refuge wherever you are. Again those wholesome activities and precious gifts which you have accumulated, cultivated and developed, no one can steal, destroy and take it away from you.

### (1) The First Precept: Abstinence from Taking Life (*Pāṇātipātā*):

The first Buddhist ethical precept (*sīla*) which is recommended and advised by the Buddha to always avoid is torturing and taking life (*pāṇātipātā*) of all breathing beings. On this earth all beings fear death, harm and injure. Beings do not want to be killed, harmed and injured because all living beings love their life even small insects. One should compare others with oneself which is afraid of killing, injuring and oppressing. You wish for long life and happiness, and any other beings also wish for the long life and happiness as oneself. Hence no beings like hurting or killing another being. Of course, the one who kills or harms will be killed or harmed in return according to the law of *kamma*. And there are two levels of killing or harming as described in Buddhist teaching. It is said that: "*Killing or injuring a human is considered worse than an animal or a larger or more highly developed animal than a lesser one.*"<sup>14</sup> Put it simply, if you do a killing or injuring any human being, the offence will be weighty rather than killing or injuring an animal being. Again, killing and injuring ordinary person and noble person also have different results and degrees. If you kill or injure an ordinary person, you will be receiving the unwholesomeness (*akusala-kamma*) with different levels and degrees. But if you kill or injure benefactors like father, mother, a noble person and a worthy one, arahant, you will be receiving more unwholesomeness (*akusala-kamma*) with higher levels and degrees from your action and then the results of those actions are also immediately present. Similarly, killing or injuring animal beings also give different results. If you kill a small animal being without the effort and energy, it will be light penalty or less offence, but if you are killing a larger animal by using with your full effort and energy, the penalty or offence will be weighty. Accordingly you will be receiving different results from your killing or injuring or oppressing those beings.

The killing or injuring a human here includes oneself as well. In this regard, David J. Kalupahana points out: "*Taking life here does not only kill others but oneself as well.*"<sup>15</sup> So committing suicide also breaks the first precept and leading to a bad rebirth. Regarding this, it is said: "*Suicide is seen as a sin or unwholesome action (akusala-kamma) and likely to lead to a bad rebirth next time.*"<sup>16</sup> "*And by taking one's own life is also blameworthy when one lays down this body and clings to a new body.*"<sup>17</sup>

Again, there are two types of killings which are considered breaking the first of the five precepts instantaneously. For instance, you kill with your own hand and effort, and you command or give the authority to somebody or agent to kill that being. In this respect, it reads: "*If a being is killed whether through oneself or ordering someone else to do so is considered as violating the first precept. This includes both whether the orderer or the agent breaks the precept, unless the agent mistakenly kills a being other than the intended one, when only he or she is responsible.*"<sup>18</sup> So a killing or injuring which happens through one's own hand and effort or commanding, it breaks the first of the five precepts. However, Sīlananda U Sayadaw argued that "*If one performs the act of killing in one's mind without real action is not considered as violating the precept because it is just a thought. Therefore, it does not violate the rule.*"<sup>19</sup> At this point, I personally disagree because when we mention about action (*kamma*), we refer to the ten wholesome and ten unwholesome courses of actions (*kammāpatha*). Either ten wholesome or ten unwholesome courses of actions are always counted with these six mental actions such as; greed, hatred, wrong view/ ignorance and non-greed,



non-hatred, non-delusion. And either unwholesome actions or wholesome actions are done and arisen with the motivation of these six mental actions. To put it another way, all actions are started with the mind. The mind is the forerunner of every deed and word. So it is very clear that the mind is part of Buddhist moral principal rule even though the action is not clear like with bodily action and verbal action. Concerning this, Bhikkhu Bodhi, a prominent Buddhist text translator and scholar also describes that all problems are started from our within or from our mind. The mind is like a master who always gives the authority, power and stimulation to the body to act and speak. In connection this, Bhikkhu Bodhi points out: "What really performs the act of killing is the mind using the body as the instrument for actualizing its aim."<sup>20</sup>

There are five factors and conditions which can be considered breaking first of the five precepts, for instance: "(1). A living-beings (*pāṇo*); (2). A consciousness of those living-beings (*pāṇasaññitā*); (3). An intention to kill (*vadhakacittam*); (4). Making an effort to kill (*upakkamo*), and, (5). The actual death of that being as a result (*tena maraṇam*)."<sup>21</sup>

This is the first Buddhist disciplines recommended by the Buddha. Violation of this precept will result in miserable life and miserable realm (*apāyabhūmi*). And if you are a Buddhist monk, you intentionally do or command or cause any human being to be killed and injured, you are losing your monkhood. However, the Buddha is not only advising his followers to be refraining from ending the lives of other living beings but also giving the instruction to extend goodwill, kindness (*mettā*) and compassion to all breathing beings starting with you. So if everybody follows this noble way by developing kindness (*mettā*) and sympathy as advised by the Buddha, the entire world will be peaceful and happy place and being freed from all violence, conflicts and wars because the influence and the power of developing kindness (*mettā*) and sympathy, it can generate happiness and peace for oneself and others because where there is sympathy, there is no cruelty. Where there is cruelty, there is no sympathy. These two things are not able to be the same page and stand together at the same time. Nowadays, various conflicts and wars are taken place due to lack of developing kindness (*mettā*) or benevolence and breaking this first moral principal rule. If kindness (*mettā*) is constantly developed and cultivated, all kinds of killing, torturing, conflicts and wars will not take place, because when the mind is fully trained and developed, all evil thoughts which is produced by covetousness (*lobha*), malice (*dosa*), ignorance (*avijjā/moha*) or wrong view (*micchaditthi*) do not have a chance to be arising in the heart and mind. So one ought to follow and develop the path of love, kindness and compassion more and more and avoid cruelty and violence.

## (2) The Second Precept: Abstinence from Taking What Is Not Given (*Adinnadānā*):

The second Buddhist ethical precept is to refrain from taking things that are not given (*adinnadānā*). If you take the other's possessions without the owner's permission and consent, it is considered morally wrong. If you take it secretly, you are called 'a thief'. But if you take it by force and threat, that is called robbery. If you are taking it, it is considered as a robber. If you give the authority or ask somebody to take it for you, you will be considered as a thief including falsely claiming for gaining other's possessions as well. Hence any taking without the owner's consent, permission whether you are secretly taking, forcing, robbing or claiming falsely in order to get the other's possessions, all of these are considered breaking the second ethical precept (*adinnadānā*).

Not only that but deceiving, cheating and denying in debt to someone is also considered morally wrong and breaking this precept. In line with this, Peter Harvey wrote: "Deception, cheating, counterfeit and falsely denying that one is in debt to someone and borrowing without permission and breaking a promise."<sup>22</sup> The gambling also ought to be avoided for it is an dishonest and misappropriate behaviour and wrong livelihood. The gambling is not only considered as morally wrong and violating second moral principal rule (*sīla*) but it also brings various issues and problems into a gambler's life, that is, enemy, loss of wealth, loss of trust, loss of friends and companions hating. And then no one would like to get married with him/her.

As regards, in the *Sigālaka Sutta* of *Dīgha Nikāya* reads: "Cha khome, gahapatiputta, ādinavā pāpamittānuyoge. Ye dhuttā, ye soṇḍā, ye pipāsā, ye nekatikā, ye vañcanikā, ye sāhasikā. Tyāssa mittā honti te sahāyā. Ime kho, gahapatiputta, cha ādinavā pāpamittānuyoge."<sup>23</sup> It means: "(1) The winner makes enemies, (2) the loser bewails his loss, (3) one wastes one's present wealth, (4) one's word is not trusted in the assembly, (5) one is despised by one's friends and companions, (6) one is not in demand for marriage, since a gambler cannot afford to maintain a wife."<sup>24</sup>

There are five factors which is considered violating this precept such as; "(1) Another's possession (*parapariggahitam*); (2) Consciousness that it is another's possession (*parapariggahitasaññitā*); (3) An intention to steal (*theyyacittam*); (4) Making an approach to steal, and (*upakkamo*); (5) The act of obtaining itself (*tena haraṇam*)."<sup>25</sup> If these five factors are complete, the second precept is broken.

## (3) The Third Precept: Abstinence from Misconduct connected to Sense Pleasures (*Kāmesu Micchācārā*):

The third Buddhist ethical precept is to avoid sexual misconduct (*kāmesu*

*micchācārā*). It literally means, "one ought to abstain from having sexual intercourse with women who are engaged, a courtesan or prostitute, at forbidden woman or the wife of another, one's mother, one's daughter, or one's paternal or maternal relations, one's own wife through a forbidden office, in an unsuitable place or an uncovered spot, or a shrine or forest, at an unsuitable time, when the wife is pregnant, when she is nursing, or when she has taken a vow break or violate this rule as well."<sup>26</sup>

Apart from this, "even having the thought of enjoying, making the effort of enjoying and tolerating the engaging of one organ with another is not only morally wrong but breaking this rule as well. Together with tolerating the sexual union is also wrong and immoral."<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, if one wants to break up from his/her partner, he is allowed to do so because "divorce is permitted and does not violate this moral principal rule. Correspondingly, having more than one husband or wife or polygamy even monogamy does not break this moral principal rule because it is not considered as sexual misconduct."<sup>28</sup>

And dealing with this moral principal rule, there are four factors and conditions which are met breaking the third moral principal code. They are as follows: "(1). A person (object) off-limits, (that is, a man or a woman who has 20 types of parenting or has a guardian to take care of) (*agamanīyavatthu*), (2). The mind to engage (*tasmim sevanacittam*), (3). An effort to engage, and (*sevanappayo*), (4). Consent to the actual union of sexual organs through one of the three orifices."<sup>29</sup> "So in order to prevent from breaking this moral precept, one should develop the contentment (*santuṭṭhita*). There are two kinds of contentment. That is concerned with the unmarried and married. In the case of the unmarried, contentment (*santuṭṭhita*) refers to contentment with the single state. In the case of the married it means contentment with one's recognized, socially accepted sexual partner (s)."<sup>30</sup>

## (4) The Fourth Precept: Abstinence from False Speech (*Musāvādā*):

The fourth Buddhist ethical precept is to avoid uttering false speech (*musāvādā*). False speeches refer to deceiving, malicious, divisive, harsh, gossip, and harmful speeches. From this perspective in the *Sampasādanīya Sutta* of *Dīghanikāya* reads: "Aparam pana, bhante, etadānuttariyam, yathā bhagavā dhammaṃ deseti bhassasamācāre. Idha, bhante, ekacco na ceva musāvādūpasāñhitam vācam bhāsatī na ca vebhūtiyam na ca pesuṇiyam na ca sārambhajam jayāpekkho; mantā mantā ca vācam bhāsatī nidhānavatim kālena. Etadānuttariyam, bhante, bhassasamācāre."<sup>31</sup> It means: "One ought to avoid not only any speech involving lying, but also speech that is divisive or sneeringly triumphant, but ought to use wise words, words to be treasured, words in season."<sup>32</sup>

Therefore, one should avoid uttering all kinds of wrong word, harmful word, unwise word and inharmonious word, and speaking only kind word, harmonious word and wise word. This is one of essential moral principal rules which one should follow, otherwise it may cause many problems, troubles and conflicts in one's life. Sometimes, you may tell lies to others. And they have no idea that you are lying to them. But you, yourself, know very well what you are telling them it is true or not. Sometimes, you can lie and deceive others, but you cannot lie and deceive yourself. So you are the one who knows the best what you are telling others correct or incorrect and moral or immoral. Of course, as a result of breaking this moral principal rule through your lying, you will constantly live your life with fear, anxiety, sorrow and restlessness. Why? Because you are afraid of people whom you were lying to them to discover the truth from you.

However, speaking the truth also should be at the right time and right place otherwise it may bring many problems into your life. These days we will often hear and come across by the newspapers and state media about some people are getting death-threats or pressures due to their speaking about the truth publicly and frankly. Accordingly telling the truth also should be at the right time, the right place and the right person. At the Buddha's time, the Buddha gave an instruction to a brahmin who approached him not to speak out about all things as he experiences and encounters in his daily life. Why? Because sometimes, it may not be true as one sees, hears, feels and understands. Even if all are true but one should not speak out about it all as one experiences and feels. This is what the Buddha addressed brahmin: "I do not say, brahmin, that everything seen should be spoken about, nor do I say that nothing seen should be spoken about. (2) I do not say that everything heard should be spoken about, nor do I say that nothing heard should be spoken about. (3) I do not say that everything sensed should be spoken about, nor do I say that nothing sensed should be spoken about. (4) I do not say that everything cognized should be spoken about, nor do I say that nothing cognized should be spoken about."<sup>33</sup>

Concerning with this moral principal rule, there are four factors which lead to transgression of false speech. They are as follows: "(1). An untrue situation (*atatham vatthu*), (2). An intention to deceive (*visaṃvādanacittam*), (3). An effort to do so, and (*tajjo vāyāmo*), (4). The communication of falseness to others (*parassa tadatthavijānananti*)."<sup>34</sup>

## (5) The Fifth Precept: Abstinence from Intoxicating Drinks and Drugs (*Surāmeraya-majja-pamādaṭṭhānā*):

The fifth Buddhist ethical precept is to avoid taking intoxicating drinks and drugs (*Surāmeraya-majja-pamādaṭṭhānā*). Why did the Buddha advise to refrain from

taking and using the intoxicating drinks and drugs? Because first of all, they cause carelessness, forgetfulness, madness and deluded mind to the user. Secondly, they cause an obstacle for developing *Buddhadhamma* and meditation to the user. Thirdly, they cause loss of dignities and good reputations and embarrassment to the user. Lastly, they can lead to the violation of the rest of four precepts as well when breaking this precept. As far as this is concerned, Peter Harvey wrote: “*Having involved in indulging in intoxicants is seen as obstructing the practice of Dhamma and can even lead to madness and breaking the rest too.*”<sup>35</sup> Consequently taking alcoholic drinks and drugs is not only being a barrier for practicing the *Dhamma* but it can also cause madness, heedlessness, lying, abusing, filthy, disgrace, wrong view and improper conduct to a man who takes it.

Furthermore, taking alcoholic drinks and drugs can also cause a man being laziness, effortlessness, gambling and visiting the streets with the inappropriate times. This is what the Buddha addressed about the negativity and disadvantages of taking alcoholic drinks and drugs: “*Cha khome, gahapatiputta, ādinavā surāmerayamajjappamādaṭṭhānānyoye. Sandiṭṭhikā dhanajāni [dhanajāni (sī. pī.)], kalahappavaḍḍhaṇi, rogānaṃ āyatanaṃ, akittisañjanāni, kopīnanidamsaṇi, paññāya dubbalikaraṇiṭveva chaṭṭhaṃ padam bhavati. Ime kho, gahapatiputta, cha ādinavā surāmerayamajjappamādaṭṭhānānyoye.*”<sup>36</sup> It means: “*When one is addicted to the intoxicants, one may not be willing to work or lack of effort. When one is addicted to the intoxicants, one haunts or visits the streets unsuitable times. When one is addicted to the intoxicants, one attends fairs. When one is addicted to the intoxicants, one addicts to gambling. When one is addicted to the intoxicants, one keeps bad company. When one is addicted to the intoxicants, one is idle. These six behaviours are the way of wasting one's substance when one is addicted to the intoxicants.*”<sup>37</sup>

As well as that, “*having taken alcoholic drinks can cause the cancers of mouth, throat, pharynx, larynx, esophagus, breast, bowel and liver. At the same time, it can also damage the cells in the mouth and throat as well by drinking alcohol according to the study of the International Agency for Research on Cancer.*”<sup>38</sup> Therefore, one should avoid taking any form of intoxicating drinks or drugs which can cause various diseases. It may result in carelessness which is a hindrance in developing the mindfulness/awareness (*satī*). For instance, one knows when one is standing, sitting, lying down, walking, long breathing in-out and short breathing in-out, along with all feelings that one is experiencing, thinking and the arising the lustful thought and non-arising the lustful thought in the mind. This is the way of living with mindfulness/awareness (*satī*).

Dealing with this moral principal rule, there are four factors which can be regarded as a complete violation of the fifth precept: “(1). *An intoxicant such as liquor etc (madanīyam)*, (2). *An intention of taking it (pātukamyatācittam)*, (3). *An activity of ingesting it, and (tājjo vāyāmo)*, (4). *An actual ingestion of the intoxicants (pīṭappavesanam).*”<sup>39</sup>

As a whole, the five Buddhist precepts (*pañca-sīla*) can be summarized in this way: The first moral principal rule is to refrain from killing, injuring, oppression, violence and extends kindness and friendliness (*mettā*) to all conscious beings. The second moral principal rule is to refrain from theft and develops generosity (*dāna*) or sharing the possessions that you have in order to reduce your greed (*lobha*) and selfishness. The third moral principal rule is to refrain from any sexual misconduct and cultivates and develops the contentment (*santutthi*). The fourth moral principal rule is to refrain from false speech, malicious speech, divisive speech, harsh speech, harmful speech and develops truthfulness (*sacca/satya*). The fifth moral principal rule is to refrain from taking the intoxicants and drugs that causes carelessness and madness and develops mindfulness/awareness (*satī*). For the first precept to the third is belonged to bodily action (*kāya-kamma*). The fourth precept is belonged to verbal action (*vacī-kamma*) and the fifth is belonged to mental action (*mano-kamma*).

## 2. The Eight Buddhist Ethical Precepts (Uposatha-Sīla):

The second type of Buddhist ethical precept is called (eight *uposatha* precepts). In *Pāli* it is called *aṭṭhaṅga uposatha sīla* or *aṭṭha-uposatha-sīla* or '*kālapariyanta-sīla*'. It is also called 'the fasting *sīla*'. As a matter of fact, the eight *uposatha* precepts (*sīla*) is like the five precepts (*pañca-sīla*) for some parts. However, the third of the eight precepts has been changed to: 'observing complete celibacy (*abrahmacariya*) when observing *uposatha-sīla*'. They (*uposatha* precepts) are added with the other three precepts after the five precepts. They are as follows: (6) *Vikālabhojanā veramaṇi sikkhāpadaṃ-samādiyāmi*. (I undertake the precept of abstaining from taking meal after midday). The eight precept observer should avoid taking (solid) food at improper or wrong time. The improper or wrong time generally refers to afternoon or evening, in order to avoid being laziness, sleepiness and increasing the lustful desires which is one of the factors to cause a barrier for the practice of *Dhamma* and developing meditation.

(7) *Nacca-gīta-vādita-visūkadassanā-mālā-gandha-vilepana-dhāraṇa-mañḍana-vibhāsanaṭṭhāna veramaṇi sikkhāpadaṃ-samādiyāmi*. (I undertake the precept of abstaining from participating in dancing, singing, instrumental music performances and unseemly shows and wearing garlands or using perfumes, cosmetics, embellishments, adornments and beautifying accessories). When you observe the eight precepts or ten precepts or more higher precepts, you should abstain from participating any forms of the entertainments such as; listening to

music, singing, dancing, playing music, watching any show and films along with wearing garlands, using perfumes and beautifying yourself. Why? Because all of these worldly pleasures and things can cause an obstruction for the practices of *Dhamma* like the fifth precept as stated above. It can also make you encounter with wandering mind, carelessness and increasing the mental defilements as well. Even wearing the attractive dress is not appropriate when observing this precept. Therefore, we usually see in Buddhist countries that lay people who observe and keep the eight precepts wear simple white dresses to avoid any attraction and fascination.

Concerning this, in the *Cūlahatthipadopama Sutta* of *Majjhimanikāya* is stated: “*He refrains from damaging seeds and plants. He practises eating only one meal a day, refraining from eating at night and improper time. He refrains from dancing, singing, music, and theatrical shows. He refrains from wearing garlands, smartening himself with scent, and embellishing himself with unguents. He refrains from high and large couches.*”<sup>40</sup>

(8) *Uccāsayanā-mahāsayanā-veramaṇi sikkhāpadaṃ-samādiyāmi*. (I undertake the precept of abstaining from using high and luxurious furniture (e.g. couches).”<sup>41</sup> Why does the eight precept observer should abstain from using high or luxurious furniture? Because comfortable furniture or comfortable zone fuels and increases mental defilements and lustful thoughts through contacting (*phassa*) them habitually. That is why we often see that a true Buddhist practitioner prefers to use simple wooden armchair, harder mattresses and wooden bed rather than using comfortable and luxurious furniture.

And the eight *uposatha* precepts are considered as special or specific precepts because they are usually observed on the special days or Buddhist holy days, such as on the Full Moon Day, New Moon Day and the two Half Moon Days. In most *Theravāda* Buddhist countries, such as Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam especially South Vietnam Buddhists choose to observe the eight *uposatha* precepts during the rainy-season retreat (*vassāvāsa*). Consequently during these three months (*vassāvāsa*), lay Buddhists wear simple white dresses and attend their local Buddhist monasteries for observing the eight *uposatha* precepts. In some Buddhist countries, the eight precept observers even stay overnight at the monastery for fully observing the eight precepts, listening to a talk from senior monks and practicing *Dhamma* together.

Buddhist people who observe the eight *uposatha* precepts (*uposatha-sīla*) can be divided into two groups. Some Buddhists observe it eternally and permanently, especially those who are older and have completed their family duties and responsibilities. Some choose to observe the eight *uposatha* precepts temporarily particularly on *uposatha* days or when joining the meditation retreats. Apart from this, *uposatha-sīla* days such as; the Full Moon Day or New Moon Day or the two Half Moon Days are not only regarded as the significant days for lay Buddhists but for Buddhist monks as well, because on these days Buddhist monks also assemble inside the *Uposatha* Hall to recite the 'code of monastic disciplines' (*pāṭimokkha*).

From this perspective, Desabandhu Alec Robertson wrote: “*Most Buddhists take these special days to observe the eight precepts, betaking to meditation, listening to discourses of the Dhamma and indulging in various forms of religious activities conducive to the serene joy and pious emotions of the faith. In a like manner, it is not only Buddhist laity having observed the eight precepts on the full moon days and the new moon days but the Saṅgha also utilized one of the uposatha days for the recitation of the 'code of monastic discipline' (Pāṭimokkha) as well.*”<sup>42</sup>

In a nutshell, the fundamental purpose of undertaking the extra precepts or the *uposatha* precepts is “*to subdue passion and to overcome craving (Tanhā).*”<sup>43</sup> “*And having observed the eight precepts is to reduce stimulating sense-inputs that disturb calm and concentration, and develop non-attachment.*”<sup>44</sup>

## 3. The Ten Ethical Precepts (Dasa-Sīla):

The ten precepts (*dasa-sīla*) are the third type of Buddhist ethical precepts. The ten Buddhist ethical precepts are especially laid down for young Buddhist monks (*sāmaneras*) who are under the age of twenty. But lay Buddhists also observe them if they want to increase their higher practices and observances. They can keep them as they wish, that is, they may keep for a certain period or for the whole life if they do not attach to their families. The ten precepts (*dasa-sīla*) are added with 'abstaining from the use of gold and silver (*jātārūpa rajatapaṭiggahanā*). Ten ethical precepts (*dasa-sīla*) are compulsory for novices (*sāmaneras*). If they break any of these ten moral rules, they are considered as defeated. With respect to this, it reads: “*If a novice breaks any one of them considered as defeat, and needs to renew the observances totally if he wishes to remain as a novice further.*”<sup>45</sup>

In fact, there are ninety-five moral principal rules for novices (*sāmaneras*) to be observing if plus with the other tens (10) and seventy-five rules (75) (*sekhiya*). The word '*Sekhiya*' is rendered as “*connected with training*” according to the Student's *Pāli-English Dictionary* of Maung Tin. They are divided into four parts. “*The first one consists of the twenty-six sekhiyas or rules (26), and they are dealt with proper behaviour and manners. The second one consists of the thirty-sekhiyas or rules (30), and they deal with food. The third one consists of the six-*



teen-sekhiyas or rules (16), and they are dealt with teaching Dhamma. The last one consists of the three miscellaneous rules.”<sup>46</sup>

### Advantages of Observing Precepts and Disadvantages of Breaking Precepts (Sīla):

Through this study is found that the one who observes the five precepts (*pañca-sīla*), eight precepts (*aṭṭhauposatha-sīla*) or ten precepts (*dasasīla*), he will be receiving many advantages from different ways in his life. Through observing Buddhist moral principal rules, he is freed from fear, anxiety and unease. Through observing Buddhist moral principal rules, he is freed from hostility, aggression and resentment. Again, he is freed from oppression, domination, brutality and harassment when one can observe them without breaking. Apart from this, he is freed from all kinds of pain, distress and diseases when keeping them. At the same time, as a result of observing the precepts, he is freed from any danger, threat and risk as well. Also he is freed from enemy, offence, penalty and mental distraction as a result of observing it. He is not only freed from negative emotional states but he is also expected to receive and experience many positive emotional states viz. happiness, tranquility and peace for observing it regularly and properly. As well as that he is expected to be reborn in a good and superior realm hereafter as a result of upholding it. From this perspective, in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* of *Dīghanikāya* is stated: “*The one who observes the ethical discipline (Sīla) he does not experience any danger from any side. He can conquer all his enemies like Khattiya King. Similarly, he experiences in himself the blameless bliss because of his keeping the precepts*”.<sup>47</sup>

Correspondingly, he is expected to obtain a large fortune, a fair name, dying unconfused, reappearing in a happy destiny and in the heavenly world after demise and loved by all as a result of maintaining ethical discipline (*sīla*). In this regard, in the *Kimbila Sutta* of *Aṅguttara-Nikāya* is stated: “*The one who lives by Buddhist ethical principal rules, he is expected to receive a large fortune and a fair name is spread abroad. Also he is not fear and hesitates to assemble with khattiyas (warrior nobles), Brahmins, householders and ascetics when living by morality. As a result of observing and living by morality, he does not die with confused mind and being reappeared in a happy destiny and heavenly world. All of these are the results and advantages of observing and perfecting in Buddhist morality*.”<sup>48</sup>

However, the one who likes to break Buddhist moral principal rules by taking life, taking what is not given, performing sexual misconduct, using false, divisive and deceiving speech and taking intoxicants and drugs, he is expected to encounter with various negative emotional states and miserable life. Due to breaking the precepts, he will be living in fearful, sorrowful and suffering. In addition, he will acquire bad reputation, dying confuse and being reborn in miserable and inferior realms. This is the disadvantages and dangers of violating the precept.

In this regard, it is also stated in the *Kimbila Sutta* of *Aṅguttara-Nikāya* in the following passage: “*The one who does not live by morality and misconduct, he loses much wealth as a result of recklessness. Again, as an unethical person, his bad reputation is spread abroad. Again, as an unethical person, he is afraid and hesitation to assemble with khattiyas (warrior nobles), Brahmins, householders and ascetics. Again as an unethical person, he reappeared in a bad destiny and in the miserable world after death. All of these are the disadvantages and dangers of violating the precept (sīla)*.”<sup>49</sup>

### Conclusion:

Through this study, I came across that Buddhist ethics is the guideline for humanity which guides one how to live, how to eat, how to communicate and how to think in day-to-day life. It is also considered as the fundamental foundation of all Buddhist practices. And it always gives advantages and disadvantages to the observer and breaker. In addition, it also affects both sides while observing and breaking them. When one observes them by abandoning from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and intoxicants and drugs, then the other sides also can live happily, peacefully and fearlessly. Nevertheless, if one breaks them by destruction of any conscious beings, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, taking intoxicants and drugs, the other sides will live with fearful life, suffering life and wandering mind in constant. Observing or breaking them is always caused the both sides and parties affected. So instead of killing, injuring and oppressing, one should extend kindness, compassion, care, understanding and respecting. Instead of taking and accepting, one should give away and share the properties that one has. Instead of being selfish person, one should cultivate the unselfishness and being contented with one already has. Instead of using wrong and harmful words, one should use the only true and kind words. Instead of taking intoxicating drinks and drugs, one should give them up and develop awareness, consciousness and mindfulness (*sati*).

Apart from this, I have also found that the good root of all wholesome actions and unselfishness are caused by non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion, love and wisdom. With fully and clearly understanding the disadvantages and dangers of breaking the precepts, he abstains from doing all evil and cultivates and develops what is good and beneficial for him and others.

Nevertheless, the bad root of unwholesome actions (*akusala-kamma*) is caused by greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), ignorance (*moha*), selfishness and meanness. To

put it another way, the motivation of breaking the precepts are caused by these three primary factors. And amongst these three factors, ignorance (*moha*) is the main root of all evils, and it is subtle than greed (*lobha*) and hatred (*dosa*) as well. Briefly speaking, any wholesome states are caused by non-greed mind or unselfish mind, non-hatred mind, non-delusion mind, love (*mettā*) and wisdom (*paññā*). Nonetheless any unwholesome states are always caused by the greedy mind or selfish mind, hatred mind and deluded mind. So either suffering or happiness is always generated from our own mind. The mind is the forerunner of everything. The mind is the chief and key to the root cause of all problems and sufferings. Simultaneously, the mind is also the solution to all problems of life as well when it has been trained and developed. And when the mind is trained, tamed, developed through the right mindfulness meditation (*vipassanā-bhāvanā*) in constant, all destructive emotional states and evil thoughts, which keep distracting and irritating oneself, will be transforming into constructive emotional states; for instance, greed to non-greed, hatred to kindness and compassion and ignorance to wisdom and selfishness to unselfishness. Therefore, by developing the mind through the right mindfulness meditation (*vipassanā-bhāvanā*) one can overcome all evil thoughts, all negative emotional states, unwholesome states, hindrances and then increasing wholesome actions, positive emotional states and stillness of mind. Strictly speaking, developing one's mind through the right mindfulness meditation (*vipassanā-bhāvanā*) offers all questions of life.

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